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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: ELECTION CAMPAIGN ENDS ON A LOW NOTE

REF: SKOPJE 346 AND PREVIOUS

#### SUMMARY

**¶1.** (SBU) The final week before the June 1 parliamentary elections has been marked by continued tensions between ethnic Albanian parties DUI and DPA. Although DUI property sustained most of the damage, there also were reports of DUI activist violence against an ethnic Macedonian spectator at a May 29 rally. Consistent USG appeals to the government (GOM) to take action to prevent election violence resulted in a more detailed and comprehensive Election Day security plan. Effective implementation of the plan would improve the chances of successful elections and could help ameliorate some of the harm Macedonia has sustained as a result of campaign violence and intimidation. Political parties of all stripes have understood the high stakes in these elections, but blame their rivals for damaging the country's NATO and EU prospects by engaging in intimidation and other unfair tactics. With the campaign period over at midnight tonight and the elections just a day away, the media are encouraging Macedonia's citizens and politicians to participate in "clean and European elections." End summary.

DUI/DPA INCIDENTS CONTINUE

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**¶2.** (SBU) In the last week before the June 1 elections, the forceful International Community (IC) message against election-related violence did not succeed in diminishing the number of violent incidents, especially in the eAlbanian parts of the country. On May 28, a DUI election office in a Gostivar neighborhood was stoned for the second time, and on May 29 a DUI office in Gostivar was destroyed, allegedly by DPA supporters. On May 29, the two eAlbanian parties held their final pre-election rallies --DUI's in Tetovo and DPA's in Gostivar-- which resulted in a number of alleged DUI/DPA incidents.

**¶3.** (SBU) According to the Ministry of Interior (MOI), the first incident occurred on the road between Gostivar and Tetovo where DUI activists were reportedly assaulted by DPA activists. After the altercation, the DUI supporters continued to their rally, while MOI investigators opened an investigation into the case. A second incident happened when, during their rally, DUI activists observed an eMacedonian in the crowd and physically assaulted him. The eMacedonian was later taken to the hospital and provided a statement to the police, who immediately arrested one of the suspects in the assault. Shortly after the DUI rally, a

group of DUI supporters intercepted the eAlbanian deputy commander of the Grupcin police station and 3 or 4 of his officers. The supporters surrounded the policemen and did not release them until the DUI suspect arrested in the earlier assault on the eMacedonian victim was released from police custody, which occurred shortly thereafter.

U.S. ANTI-VIOLENCE MESSAGE GETTING THROUGH?..

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¶4. (SBU) Throughout the pre-election period, the Mission at all levels has conveyed a strong unified message in support of free and non-violent elections. On May 26, the Ambassador met with the Prime Minister to deliver that message; the DCM, jointly with EUSR Ambassador Fouere and ODIHR Ambassador Barry, met with the Minister of Interior to urge the government once again to take decisive action against election-related violence (reftels). On May 27, the DCM met also with the Chief of Counterintelligence and delivered an equally forceful message against election violence and an appeal to the MOI to do everything in its power to prevent incidents. The Ambassador will participate in a May 31 joint press event with EUSR Fouere and the election monitoring NGO MOST and make a final appeal to the citizens of Macedonia to exercise their right to vote in a civilized and calm manner.

¶5. (SBU) On May 29, Director of Police Todorovski briefed Post's police advisor on the MOI election security plan. Presenting a slightly improved version of the 2006 parliamentary elections plan, the MOI's leadership took into consideration IC comments, especially regarding the deployment of the special police forces, the "Alphas."

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Todorovski said that all Alphas will be clearly identifiable as police officers and that 15 politically active Alpha officers had already been re-assigned from the Tetovo/Gostivar region. On Election Day, all non-uniformed police officers in the vicinity of polling stations will be clearly identifiable as police officers, with Rapid Deployment Unit (RDU) officers waiting in reserve near potential "hot spots." Todorovski added that non-police persons found to be in possession of weapons would be arrested immediately.

ELECTION DAY CONCERNS

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¶6. (SBU) Senior party officials across the political spectrum told us this week they fully support peaceful and "uneventful" elections on June 1. The PM's Chief of Staff and VMRO election campaign chief Prostogor said PM Gruevski was planning to issue a statement May 30 calling on all eligible voters to vote in a free and peaceful process on Sunday. SDSM VP Ivanovski and DUI VP Arifi shared concerns about special Alpha police harassment in Tetovo and Gostivar, and alleged that DPA and VMRO teams were planning to cooperate in "stuffing ballots early in the morning, just after polls open on June 1." DPA VP Dogani and VMRO's Veljanovski dismissed such accusations, but confirmed that VMRO and DPA teams would monitor all polling stations "to protect the votes." DUI's Arifi said DUI would also have monitors in all polling stations and would be able to "solve all problems on its own," as long as the police act professionally. SDSM's Ivanovski said he expected DUI/DPA clashes "in all areas where DPA is slightly stronger than DUI."

...EXPECTATIONS ABOUT VOTER TURNOUT

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¶7. (SBU) VMRO's Veljanovski told us May 29 VMRO needs about 400,000 people out of the over 1.7 million eligible voters to come out and vote. With such a turnout, "92 eMacedonian MP seats will be at play," he said. SDSM's Ivanovski predicted a higher turnout of eMacedonians than in 2006, and a slightly

lower eAlbanian turnout, especially in Electoral District 6, in which only 50% of registered voters actually reside in the District.

...PROJECTED RESULTS

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¶ 8. (SBU) Asked about election result predictions, DPA's Dogani claimed his party would be victorious in all eAlbanian areas, except for Kichevo, Zajez and Oslomej, where "DPA supporters have been threatened by DUI." At any rate, Dogani added, DPA will end up with at least two more MP seats than rival DUI. DUI's Arifi refrained from commenting on likely election results, but said VMRO would look at DUI as a potential coalition partner only if "VMRO and DPA fail in their attempt to falsify the election results." According to VMRO's Veljanovski, the ratio in the eMacedonian camp will be either 60/30, or 65/25 MP seats in favor of VMRO against SDSM. Contrary to Gruevski's recent public statements in support of DPA, Veljanovski said VMRO did not favor one eAlbanian party over the other and would be open to forming a governing coalition with the winner, or even "an eAlbanian party that has 2-3 fewer MP seats than its rival."

LAST POLLS AND MEDIA APPEALS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS

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¶ 9. (SBU) On May 26, media reported on the results of the last opinion poll before the June 1 elections conducted by the Skopje-based Institute for Democracy on May 24-25. The polls show that VMRO, with 31.3% support, kept its three-to-one lead over SDSM (11.2%), while DUI enjoys the support of 9.1% of the respondents and DPA of 5.6%. Over 40% of the respondents said they had not decided whom to vote for. A local political analyst dismissed the validity of the opinion poll, since it had been conducted only in Electoral District 1, and as such was not representative of the whole country.

¶ 10. (SBU) Hours before the end of the campaign period at midnight tonight, all media have come out with strong

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messages of support for a free and peaceful election process and an appeal to citizens to vote "wisely, responsibly and in a European way." A total of 2,898 polling stations will open Sunday at 7 a.m. and close at 7 p.m. The State Electoral Committee is expected to announce the preliminary results 12 hours after the end of voting. The Embassy is deploying 24 election monitoring teams, plus two teams assigned to ODIHR.

COMMENT

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¶ 11. (SBU) Macedonian politicians of all stripes have received the message that the election campaign intimidation, violence, and other problems have already marred the image of their country. A peaceful and orderly Election Day could still make it possible for Macedonia to pass this important test and put the country back on track for its NATO and EU candidacies. Election Day violence and intimidation, however, would probably result in a failing grade that could derail the country and lead to serious tensions in both the eAlbanian and eMacedonian communities, and between the two. Milovanovic